

# COASTAL CONNECTIONS



VOLUME 1 / ISSUE 2

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION FOCUSED ON TOOLS FOR COASTAL RESOURCE MANAGERS

APRIL / MAY 2003

## COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROFILE



### Phillip Hinesley

Chief, Coastal Section  
Alabama Coastal Area  
Management Program  
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**Residence:** Daphne, Alabama

**Education:** Bachelor of science in planning and urban studies from the University of Southern Mississippi

**How long you've worked with the program:** 13 years

**Most fulfilling aspect of your job:** Helping the public

**Most challenging aspect of your job:** Dealing with budgets

**One work-related accomplishment you're proud of:** The many 306a public access projects (piers, park improvements, etc.)

**One personal accomplishment you're proud of:** The birth of my two daughters

**Things you do in your spare time:** Sailing, fishing, and hiking

**Family:** Wife, LaDonna; daughters, Maggie and Anna

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## THIS ISSUE'S FOCUS

### CONDUCTING AUDIENCE NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

After six months of hard work, you've finally finished. You've developed a publication describing recent coastal trends in your area and have begun marketing it to your customers. But after a few months of advertising the book, requests are still slow. Finally, you ask a potential customer you know well why she hasn't ordered it. She answers, "Well, actually we use a new Web site that gives us up-to-date information on trends every three months."

Before you started that project, you could have used a needs assessment. Needs assessments tell you what your audience already knows, what they need to know, and what they would be willing to do to get the information.

#### Why Do a Needs Assessment?

According to Ginger Hinchcliff, manager of the NOAA Coastal Services Center's Coastal Learning Services, "knowing what the skills and needs of your audience are will help you build a better product." For instance, the California Sea Grant Extension Program is planning an assessment to help determine the training needs of staff at the California Department of Fish and Game. The assessment will help find out what kinds of training will benefit Fish and Game staff most in implementing a new state law on marine life management. You could also use a needs assessment to answer these questions:

- What do residents in your area already know about the local ecosystem and how to conserve it? Results can then help you plan effective outreach for restoration efforts.
- In what format do your customers most like to receive information? Web sites? Workshops? Newsletters? Pamphlets?
- What are the training needs of your own organization? What is your staff already proficient in, and in what areas could they use professional development? What resources are available for training?

#### How Do I Conduct an Assessment?

There are four major stages in conducting a needs assessment: planning, data collection, data analysis, and application.

**1. Planning:** In the planning stage, you need to establish the purpose and goals of the needs assessment, as well as the actual methods you will use to conduct it. To do this, consider the following tasks:

- Reiterate the issue and your audience
- Establish a planning team and the resources you will need
- Set goals and objectives
- Characterize the audience, including size, education, job titles, etc.
- Search for previous data or research on the audience or issue

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**Favorite movie:** *Close*

*Encounters of the Third Kind*

**In your CD player right**

**now:** Lots of Beatles CDs

**Needs assessment work:**

Sent questionnaires to general public and nonprofits to assess their coastal training needs

Coastal manager. Urban planner. Licensed real estate agent. Eagle Scout. Who is this man of many talents? Phillip Hinesley, chief of Alabama's coastal management program.

Phillip started his career as an urban planner, but after 10 years, he realized development was going on a little too well, and someone needed to pay attention to coastal conservation. "I saw a need for it," Phillip notes. "I had the background and the interest and pretty much fell into it."

Now a seasoned coastal manager, Phillip is currently juggling 38 different grant tasks, including expansion of facilities at the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve and land acquisition programs in other local coastal areas. While "all of these projects are important," he explains, the greatest accomplishment is to "actually provide people the opportunity to enjoy coastal resources."

Phillip's dedication to public service started at a young age. As a Boy Scout growing up in southern Mississippi, he earned the rank of Eagle Scout by organizing a town-wide community cleanup. Fifteen years later, Phillip helped organize Alabama's coastal cleanup. "I have a picture of me in my Scout uniform with bags of trash, and a picture of me as an adult standing on a beach with bags of trash."

Once a Boy Scout, always a Boy Scout.

Needs assessments continued from Page 1

**2. Data Collection:** There are a number of ways to collect data. However, before you decide, consider your resources for collecting, analyzing, and managing the data. See "Collecting Assessment Data" on page 3 of this newsletter for more details on different collection methods. Once you have decided on your methods,

- Determine a sample size of your audience
- Design and test your collection method
- Gather and record the data

**3. Data Analysis:** Analyzing the data can often be the hardest part. Several software programs exist that can help synthesize and analyze data, or you can hire a statistician. After you have analyzed the data,

- Store the data—and metadata—for future use
- Write the report, synthesizing your findings and recommendations

**4. Application:** Use what information you now have to build a better product!

### What if I Have Few Resources?

There may be times when you won't have the time or the resources to conduct an in-depth needs assessment. The City of Houston learned that firsthand. On June 5, 2001, Tropical Storm Allison landed in southeast Texas, hitting the Houston area especially hard. To help people recover quickly and safely, the city had to find out what its people needed—and fast. "We really needed to get a sense of the impacts on the city and what it needed to do to prioritize services for the community," says Sharon Marsh of the Houston Department of Health and Human Services.

To do this, the City of Houston organized an impromptu, one-day needs assessment, visiting and surveying the communities that were hit to determine what they needed. After a quick training session on conducting a survey, volunteers spent one Saturday going door-to-door to ask people about the damage and their health.

The results of the assessment were immediately useful. The city learned what kind of assistance was needed and where, what issues to continue studying, and how to make quick policy decisions. Their report also helped other city departments determine the work they needed to do.

As the City of Houston demonstrated, conducting a needs assessment can be as large and detailed or as small and quick as you need it to be, as long as it is adequately planned. Marsh recommends that agencies consider hosting needs assessment training before they have to do one. "The more staff who already know about it, the easier it will be to do," she adds.

## AND THE SURVEY SAYS . . .

So you *think* you know your customers, but do you really? Here are a few questions from the Center's 2002 Coastal Resource Management Customer Survey, answered by managers like you. See how your answers compare to what the data show. Gathering objective data in an assessment can help avoid speculation so you can develop the most useful products for your audience. You can find the answers to these questions at the bottom of the page.

What percentage of coastal resource management professionals . . .

1. Have Internet access on their own desktops?  
a) 55   b) 86   c) 95
2. Say lack of human resources is the main impediment to sharing data?  
a) 32   b) 45   c) 62
3. Rank habitat restoration as a high priority?  
a) 13   b) 45   c) 71

Answers: 1. c 2. a 3. b

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## COLLECTING ASSESSMENT DATA

### SEVEN BASIC METHODS

There are many different ways to collect data for a needs assessment, but here is a short description of seven of the most commonly used methods and major pros and cons for each.

**Observation**—watch and record behavior

Pro: inexpensive, doesn't interrupt work

Con: observer's presence may alter behavior

**Interviews**—ask questions directly to a person, either face-to-face or via technology

Pro: allows for multiple perspectives and elaboration

Con: can be very time intensive

**Focus Groups**—ask questions of a representative group of people

Pro: fosters brainstorming, provides wide range of views

Con: participants may influence each other, difficult to analyze

**Oral Survey**—interview using set questions and answer choices

Pro: interviewer can clarify questions, easy to analyze

Con: no free expression, interviewer may influence participants

**Written Survey**—ask participants to complete written questionnaires

Pro: easy to distribute widely and to analyze, unbiased

Con: information can be interpreted differently

**Existing Data**—analyze existing reports, work samples, evaluations, and other data

Pro: often less time consuming

Con: data can be out-of-date or incomplete

**Test**—assess particular knowledge or skill level using an exam

Pro: easy to quantify results and note deficiencies

Con: hard to validate questions, people don't like tests

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## NOAA Coastal Services Center Training Course: HOW TO CONDUCT A TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

If you're interested in conducting an assessment of customer training needs, this two-day workshop may be for you. The course introduces the terminology, tools, and methods of needs assessments so you can determine how and when to use them. At the end of the course, you will have the information you need to conduct a needs assessment for your organization. Here are some of the topics the course covers:

- Why and when you would conduct a needs assessment
- Steps for planning one
- Audience characterization
- Methods for data collection
- Analyzing and managing data
- Potential data sharing opportunities

The workshop also provides a manual of additional information and support materials, including case studies, sample surveys, and sample needs assessment reports. The Center will provide the training and materials for the workshop and will work with organizations to host one in their region. If your organization could benefit from learning how to conduct a needs assessment, visit the Center's training Web site at [www.csc.noaa.gov/cms/clis/needs\\_assessment.html](http://www.csc.noaa.gov/cms/clis/needs_assessment.html).

## WE WANT YOUR INPUT!

The goal of *Coastal*

*Connections* is to help link members of the coastal resource management community to the people, information, and technology they need. To do this, we need your input. We encourage you to send us your questions and suggestions for the newsletter, as well as updates on what's happening in your organization, such as new laws and policies in your area, major meetings or conferences, or new projects and programs. Please see our contact information on the back cover. We hope to hear from you soon!

### Ideas for Upcoming Issues

Expect future issues to focus on the following tools and subjects:

- Beach renourishment
- Remote sensing
- Metadata
- Risk and vulnerability assessments
- Smart growth

If you have a topic on which you'd like us to focus in an upcoming issue, please contact us with your ideas.

*Coastal Connections* is a publication of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal Services Center, produced for the coastal resource management community. Each issue of this free bimonthly newsletter focuses on a tool, information resource, or methodology of interest to the nation's coastal resource managers.

Please send us your questions and suggestions for future editions. To subscribe or contribute to the newsletter, contact our editors at

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NOAA/CSC/20318-PUB

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# NEWS AND NOTES



## New Spatial Technology Bulletin for Louisiana

The Louisiana Spatial Reference Center has published the first edition of its new technical bulletin. This publication focuses on current spatial technology activities and their implications for local issues. For more information, contact the director of the Spatial Reference Center at [webmaster@lsrclsu.edu](mailto:webmaster@lsrclsu.edu).

## Funding Available for Projects in Pacific Northwest

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is accepting applications to fund projects that will address environmental challenges in the Pacific Northwest. Applications for the next round of grants must be postmarked by March 18, 2003. For more information, visit [www.caprep.com/0103060.htm](http://www.caprep.com/0103060.htm).

## Call for Papers for New Hawaii Coastal Conference

Abstracts are now being accepted for the Hawaii Summit-to-Sea 2003 conference, to be held October 26 to 29. Topics include traditional and cultural wisdom, resource management, research and education, and ocean industry. Visit [www.hawaiiormp.com](http://www.hawaiiormp.com) for more information.

## Transitions

**Jan Boyd** is the new director of the Mississippi Office of Coastal Ecology, replacing **Daryl Jones**.... **Brian Allee** is the new director of the Alaska Sea Grant College Program. He takes over from interim director **Susan Sugai**.... **Eldon Hout** has been named the new director of NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management. He replaces acting director **Douglas Brown**, who will continue working as deputy director... **Matthew Pickett** has left his position as manager of California's Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary to become chief of NOAA's Remote Sensing Division Flight Program in Silver Spring, Maryland. **Christopher Mobley** is the new sanctuary manager... The Michigan Sea Grant Program is seeking a new director to replace **Russell Moll**. **George Carignan** is serving as the interim director.

## Accolades

**Nancy Targett**, professor and Sea Grant researcher at the University of Delaware, has been named a National Associate of the National Academy of Sciences... **Robert Stickney**, director of the Texas Sea Grant program, has been elected president of the Sea Grant Association.

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